GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR

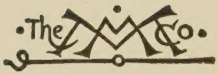
EDWARD S. DROWN

231.8R
D839

Class 231.8 P Book D839
General Theological Seminary Library
Chelsea Square, New York

PRESENTED BY
Soc'y for Promoting Religion and Learning

GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO · DALLAS
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR

BY

EDWARD S. DROWN, D.D.

Professor in the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, and author of "The Apostles' Creed To-day"

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL OF THE PACIFIC LIBRARY BERKELEY

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1919

All rights reserved

231.8R'
D839

65520

COPYRIGHT, 1918
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Set up and electrotyped. Published, December, 1918

CANISIUS COLLEGE
LIBRARY
BUFFALO, N. Y.

Ap 7 '19

TO
MY WIFE

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_Y0-CAL-952

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	God before the Judgment Seat of Humanity	1
II	Why Does God the Father Almighty Allow Evil? . . .	7
III	Is God Limited?	21
IV	Power through Limitation . .	35
V	The True Omnipotence . . .	46

GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR

I

GOD BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF HUMANITY

It has long been an article of the Christian faith that man is to stand before the judgment seat of God. To-day positions seem to be reversed. God stands before the judgment seat of man, charged with high crimes and misdemeanors. He is on trial for His life. Can we allow a God to exist who is responsible for the sin and horror of this present world? Is not the world to-day likely to apply to God Himself the sentence passed by the scribes and elders on the Son of God, "He is guilty of death"? Is it false to say that God

stands before the judgment seat of man, on trial for His life?

Shocking though these thoughts be, yet they exist all around us in the minds of men to-day. They are a challenge to all those who believe in the Christian God of love and power. Can we give a reason for the faith that is in us? Can we express that faith in terms that will appeal to our own age? If belief in God is to be maintained, that belief must meet the difficulties which the present world presents to faith.

Can we retain the belief in God? And if so, must the thought of God be changed to meet the present need? It is a challenge to the Christian Church. To decline the challenge is to turn our backs to the struggle, and to sit with Achilles pondering in his tent.

The problem of evil is not new. It is as old as human life. And the task of reconciling evil with belief in God is as old as is the belief in God. The problem is new only in its intensity. At times it has been academic, appealing only to the philosopher or the theolo-

gian, or appealing to the common man only in some great crisis of his life. But in a time of world tragedy the problem comes out of the study, and makes its presence known in the market place. We may say that the brutal murder of one little child presents as great a problem as does the death of millions of soldiers and the torture of unnumbered Belgians and Armenians. And yet when we so speak, we are talking in the terms of academic seclusion. Actually the problem, old in essence, is new in bigness and in insistent force. Men must to-day have, if not a solution, at any rate some way to keep themselves sane in heart and mind.

It may seem presumptuous for one to try to meet in any way that demand who is himself in his own experience remote from the experience that makes the demand necessary. How remote we in this country are from the bitter experiences of Belgium and France, how free still from the cloud that darkens every house in England! What right have we here to try to answer a question that

is voiced in the cold and blood and horror of the trenches? No right surely if we have no sense of a common humanity, no right if in heart and will we are remote from the world's sorrow and the world's need. But if we are really human in our sympathy, it may be that our very position of detachment may let us see some things that are not seen in the midst of the conflict. From the seclusion of our safety we may be able to contribute some small bit to the solution of a problem which can be fully solved only by contributions from many sources. I purpose to deal only with one small aspect of the problem, and thus at least to try to do my bit.

I purpose to discuss how our belief in God, how our thought of God, is related to the fact of the world war. I set aside the question whether our thought of God is a true thought, whether it actually corresponds to the divine reality. That is a subject by itself, involving the whole question of theological knowledge. But in any case, whatever be the source of our

thought, whether it be derived from a revelation of God or from human reason, or whether or not these two can be separated, the fact remains that our thought of God is the only idea of God that we have. It behooves us to see that our thought is logical and consistent. Modest as we may be, uncertain as to whether our ideas adequately represent divine reality, we have no right to be illogical or lazy in our thinking, and then to ascribe the results of that lack of logic or of that laziness to the nature of God. I presume then that we are discussing our thought about God, and that we are to try to render that thought logical and consistent, to free it from the difficulties that are due to our own fault.

Moreover I assume that the thought about God which we are considering is the Christian thought. By that I mean the thought that was held and taught by Jesus, and which has become the heritage of the Christian world. It is true that this thought has from time to time undergone changes, it is true that

among Christians there are differences of emphasis and of interpretation in regard to it. Yet there are fundamental elements in the Christian thought of God which distinguish it from that thought which is held, for example, by Mohammedans or by Buddhists. It is with this fundamental Christian thought that I am concerned.

II

WHY DOES GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY ALLOW EVIL?

IT is evident that the Christian thought of God does not in itself do away with our problem, the problem of evil. Rather it intensifies the problem, if it does not create it. The problem is not, Why should there be evil in the world? To that question we might appropriately answer, Why not? Is there anything in the nature of the world or of man that forbids the emergence of evil? The problem arises only when we confront the fact of evil with the fact of our belief in God. If there were no God, there would be no problem. And more than that, there would be no problem if our thought of God did not include elements that are hostile to the fact of evil. If God be a mere substance underlying all reality,

if He be the God of pantheism, then of course there is no problem. All things are God, or God is all things, and the mystery of God is just the mystery of all life, no more, no less. Or if there be many gods, it is no wonder that out of their conflicting aims should come the disorder and contradictions of the world. Or if God be confessedly a limited God, opposed by an original principle of evil, as in the ancient religion of Persia, then again there is no difficulty. The conflict of good and evil is reflected in the thought of God, indeed the thought of God is but the expression of that conflict. Or, lastly, if God be a veiled Being, expressing an inscrutable will, which man must recognize and accept, but has no right to judge, then such a Being may as well produce evil as good. "Shall the thing that is formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" In all these forms of belief there is no special difficulty in believing in God while we at the same time experience and acknowledge the evil of the world.

It is the Christian thought of God that produces the problem. For the Christian belief in God unites two elements, the divine power and the divine goodness. If there is one God, if He is all powerful and all good, how can we explain evil? That is the mystery. It is the direct product of the Christian idea of God.

Let us look a little more closely at this idea. Jesus taught that God is the Father. If we would understand this teaching we must understand its background, which is not the background of the twentieth century. We tend to think of fatherhood in somewhat weak and sentimental terms, to conceive of the father as an indulgent parent. The modern State and the modern school have largely absorbed the elements of law and discipline which in the ancient world belonged to the family. If we will understand the mind of Christ, we must remember that in the ancient world the father was the source of authority and power. The family was the seat of law. When Jesus teaches

that God is the Father, His teaching is not of God as a mere indulgent parent, but of God as the supreme possessor of authority and power.

Herein Jesus stands in the line of development of the prophets of Israel. The apex and goal of Hebrew prophecy was in the doctrine of creation. Jahweh, from being the limited God of Israel, becomes the God of the world, the creator of the ends of the earth. He is possessed of supreme power. All things are subject to His righteous will.

This concept of the creative God, Jesus accepts in all its fullness. There is no softening of the divine authority or power. "With God all things are possible." There is no modifying of the divine righteousness as the source of law. But all these concepts are transformed and ennobled by the teaching of the divine Fatherhood. The essence of God is creative love. Therein the thought of God is completely moralized. Love is the source of the divine authority and power. Love is

the cause and purpose of creation. God is Creator, but as Creator He is also Father. Man is the creature of God, but as creature he is the child of God, the son of God, made to receive the fullness of the life of God. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." There are no limits to the creative power and goodness of God. The thought of God is completely moralized.

Now, it is just this thought of God that makes so compelling the problem of evil. We seem to be faced by a clear dilemma. If God be of supreme power, cannot He stop the suffering of the world? If He be of supreme goodness, will He not do so? Is it not a clear case that God either will not or cannot destroy the evil of the world? I come back to my opening words. God, the Christian God, stands before the judgment seat of man. He is accused either of impotence or of wickedness. Convicted of either, He ceases to be the Christian God. God is put on trial for His life.

This problem is to-day no product of the study. It comes from the very heart of suffering humanity. Witness the following passage from that striking book, *Papers from Picardy,* written by two chaplains at the front. "'Why does God allow all this suffering to go on so long, when, if as you say He is Almighty, He could stop it at once; above all, why does He allow such a lot of people who aren't to blame to suffer most?' Such is the question which is being asked by thousands of people in the ranks, and at home." [1] Here is the voice from the trenches, demanding a solution, a very cry for help in time of need. Can we say anything that will satisfy that need?

All that I can do is to suggest certain fundamental elements which, it seems to me, must enter into that answer. The particular form into which they should be put, the particular language which should be used in expressing them, must depend on circumstances. I make no attempt for such

[1] P. 198.

popularity of language as must be the special work of the preacher and pastor. I do ask the reader's attention to certain truths which, it seems to me, that language should seek to convey.

And, first, it is to be noted that it is no answer to our problem to-day to have recourse to the inscrutable will of God. This was the answer so clearly given by Calvin, in discussing the reprobation of the wicked. "We must," he says, "always return to the mere pleasure of the divine will, the cause of which is hidden in himself." Calvin does not mean that the will of God can itself conceivably be unrighteous, but, as he interprets Paul, "that the procedure of divine justice is too high to be scanned by human measure, or comprehended by the feebleness of human intellect." Yet our trust in that righteousness is a trust in something completely unknown, except as the divine will reveals it. "Why he willed it is not ours to ask, as we cannot comprehend, nor can it become us even to raise a controversy as to the justice of

the divine will. Whenever we speak of it, we are speaking of the supreme standard of justice."[1] For us, then, the practical result is that whatever God wills must necessarily be right.

It may seem that to answer Calvinism to-day is a needless task, that, notwithstanding his greatness, there are few so poor to do him reverence. And yet there is a widespread resort to an answer that is essentially that of Calvin. Beyond doubt God's ways are not as our ways, beyond doubt we cannot understand the Almighty to perfection. But it does not in the least help our problem to say that divine power and divine goodness are somehow reconciled in God, but that we do not know how. Far less is it an answer to suggest that, while goodness as we know it in human life is certainly incompatible with the will to allow evil, yet goodness in God may be so different from goodness in man that we cannot apply to God any human estimate

[1] *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Book III, Chap XXIII, 4, 5.

of right and wrong. For the heart of Christian belief is that God is not an unknown God, but that His character is revealed and known as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To assert that God is love, and to assert with the same breath that divine love and human love are not essentially the same, is to toy with words, and to give up any real reliance on the divine character. So to do is to have resort to an unknown quantity, to an *x,* instead of to God our Father; it is to accept the consolation offered by the illiterate preacher who told his congregation that they were all in the hands of an unscrupulous Providence. Against such an unscrupulous inscrutability there goes up continually the cry of the human heart, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" We must definitely give up the appeal to inscrutability as an answer to our problem.

There is one other answer, which has had its popularity, but which signally fails to meet the conditions of our own time. It consists of the attempt

to interpret all evil as a necessary part of the highest good. It assumes that good cannot exist without evil, as music cannot exist without discord, or a picture without shadow. Evil is the discord that brings out the harmony, the shadow that enhances the beauty of the light. We call evil evil because we see only a portion of the perfect whole. If we could see the whole, we should see that evil plays a necessary and valuable part in the great drama of life. We hear the discord, God hears the harmony. And God sees that the discord is that without which the harmony could not exist. We must accept the words of Pope,

> "And spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
> One truth is clear, Whatever is is right."

Such an optimism has certain elements of truth. We can see that, without difficulties to overcome, life would be devoid of meaning. We can readily imagine that a world where everything was calm and peaceful and with-

out struggle would not bring out the best in human life. To try to make a perfect world by making a world that is perfectly monotonous, would be to create a desert and call it peace. So far the answer has value.

But it fails the moment we begin to apply it to the actual facts of life today. Can any conceivable universe be good that demands for its goodness the presence of cruelty and hate and lust? What kind of a world is it that draws its goodness from the blood of murdered children, and the tears of childless widows, made childless and widows by the sin of man? And what kind of a God is a God who can look with complacency on such a universe, and who hears only the harmony that demands discords such as we hear today? Such a God cannot be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or, if that is the best universe that God our Father can create, then are we not justified in charging Him with impotence? If God either will not or can-

not produce a better world than this, does not He stand convicted before the judgment seat of man?

Two other suggestions may be made as to the weakness of this answer. In the first place, it takes the moral incentive out of life. Our task is to overthrow evil and establish good. But if we suspect that the evil is not evil at all, but only a part of the highest good, what meaning has that task? If we should overcome such evil, should we not be injuring the universe instead of saving it? If, in Pope's phrase, partial evil is universal good, must we not sit down with folded hands and contemplate a world which we cannot better, and in which we have only to admire a perfect whole?

The other difficulty with this theory is a logical one. It wholly fails to discriminate between different kinds of evil. There are things which we call evil, and which, seen in a larger way, are undoubtedly parts of the better good. But there are other evils which are wholly bad, and which can by no

means be made a part of a perfect whole. There are two kinds of discord, as far asunder as are the poles. One is the discord written into the score by the composer. Such discord has its place, and is necessary for the harmony. But there is another kind of discord, which comes from the player being out of tune. Such discord does not help the harmony, but injures or destroys it. Suppose a player in an orchestra to say: "The symphony needs discord in order that its harmony may be appreciated. So I will persistently play flat, and thus make my contribution to the perfect whole." Such a discord has no place. The only way it can help the harmony is by ceasing to exist. The shadow put in the picture by the painter has its value. But to hurl an inkstand at a picture, in order to improve its light and shade, is the act of a madman. So it is with sin. It is the false discord, the blot on the painting. To interpret it as a part of the highest good, is either to fail in logic, or to incur the moral condemnation pronounced on those

who call evil good, and good evil, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

The complacent optimism of this theory may have its place in the secluded study of some abstract philosopher. It can have no value for men intent on the moral task, and in touch with the realities of life to-day. It must be definitely abandoned as a solution for our problem.

III

IS GOD LIMITED?

WE come back to our real problem, the relation between almightiness and love, or goodness. And one method of solution, widely in evidence to-day, is frankly to give up one horn of the dilemma by saying that God is not almighty, that He is a limited God. This answer is so widespread, is of such importance, and leads so directly to the point that I myself would emphasize, that I ask for it the reader's special attention.

Perhaps nowhere is this sacrifice of the idea of omnipotence more clearly expressed than by John Stuart Mill in his *Three Essays on Religion.* "The only admissible moral theory of Creation is that the Principle of Good *cannot* at once and altogether subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral. . . . Many have derived a base

confidence from imagining themselves to be favorites of an omnipotent but capricious and despotic Deity. But those who have been strengthened in goodness by relying on the sympathetic support of a powerful and good Governor of the world, have, I am satisfied, never really believed that Governor to be, in the strict sense of the term, omnipotent. They have always saved his goodness at the expense of his power." [1]

It is well known how strongly and with how much deeper sense of the religious values involved, this doctrine of a finite or limited God is defended by the beloved philosopher, William James. "'God,' in the religious life of ordinary men, is the name not of the whole of things, heaven forbid, but only of the ideal tendency in things, believed in as a superhuman person who calls us to co-operate in his purposes, and who furthers ours if they are worthy. He works in an external environment, has limits, and has enemies. When John Mill said that the notion of

[1] *Three Essays on Religion.* Essay on *Nature.*

God's omnipotence must be given up, if God is to be kept as a religious object, he was surely accurately right; yet so prevalent is the lazy monism that idly haunts the region of God's name, that so simple and truthful a saying was generally treated as a paradox: God, it was said, *could* not be finite. I believe that the only God worthy of the name *must* be finite." [1] And again, "The line of least resistance, then, as it seems to me, both in theology and in philosophy, is to accept, along with the superhuman consciousness, the notion that it is not all-embracing, the notion, in other words, that there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once." [2]

Mr. H. G. Wells has strongly insisted on the idea of a God who is finite, who is youth, who is courage, who is growing in knowledge and in power, and who needs men to serve Him in bringing in the Kingdom of God.[3]

I do not mean to put on the same

[1] *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 124.
[2] Ibid., p. 311.
[3] *God, the Invisible King*, passim.

level the patronizing attitude of Mill toward religion, the delicacy and moral earnestness of William James, and the somewhat violent dogmatism of Mr. Wells. But they all hold one common thought, that God is finite, and, especially, that His power is limited, that if God is good, He cannot at the same time be omnipotent.

Now I find myself deeply in sympathy with much that is here set forth. If it were a choice between omnipotence and character or love, I trust that we should all have grace to choose the character of God, even if we gave up His power. And the idea of omnipotence has often been so presented as to take all the life out of the universe, to make it a fixed and determined thing, and so to prevent the working of the supreme power of love. A universe without any risk in it is not a universe that can show forth the working of love. It makes but little difference what form such a "block universe," as James calls it, may take. It may take that of a deterministic Calvinism which

says that some *must* be damned, or of an equally deterministic Universalism which says that all *must* be saved. It may be the mechanical universe of Mr. Bertrand Russell, who finds the future already as determined as the past, and who says "It is a mere accident that we have no memory of the future." [1] Or it may be that type of finalism which M. Bergson calls "inverted mechanism," where the end to be accomplished is so definitely foreseen that all the means to it are already established. All such set, "block" universes may be the result of divine omnipotence, or, like Mr. Bertrand Russell's, the result of mechanical causation. They are surely not the expression of divine love. Far better to have some element of risk, of uncertainty, of adventure, than such a lifeless world. And if the only possible concept of omnipotence leads to such a result, let us gladly offer up omnipotence as a sacrifice to love.

Yet the sacrifice should not be lightly made. The concept of omnipotence

[1] *Scientific Method in Philosophy*, p. 234.

has too much religious value to be set aside without necessity. Schleiermacher's definition of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence contains elements of profound truth. And how can God be the object of such dependence, the background of all life, the source of all moral activity and strength, if He is not Himself the source of all power? We speak lightly of Calvinism. We must not forget the power of Calvinism, with its belief in the omnipotent God, to inspire men to high and noble deeds. The descendants of New England Puritans should not forget the rock from which they were hewn, the hole of the pit from which they were digged. Through faith in the power of God, the Pilgrim Fathers "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." For courage in life we need the confidence of St. Paul, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." Can we not do something to retain the belief in the omnipotent God, the source of all con-

fidence and strength, and at the same time free that belief from the difficulties which we have been considering? Can we not express that belief in more moral, more truly Christian, terms? May it not be that the concept of omnipotence which has given us so much trouble is really more pagan than Christian? It is this subject that I propose to consider in the rest of this discussion.

The thought common to Mill and to James is that, in order to account for evil, and at the same time to retain the goodness of God, we must limit the power of God. May it not be that these so-called "limits" are rather the conditions of goodness than the limitations of power? Are we not in danger of confusing *conditions* with *limitations?* May not that which we call a "limit" really be an excellence? May not the so-called limited God of Mill and James really be a higher Being than the so-called unlimited God whom they are opposing?

Let me take a simple illustration. I

was once talking with an exponent of so-called "New Thought." In the course of conversation I remarked (and the remark was probably due to a suggestion from William James) that as one grew older he grew happier, because he found out his limits, and was content to abide in them. My New-Thought friend turned to me with a transcendental smile, and said softly, "Oh, but you have no limits." I felt almost insulted. It was certainly no compliment to be told that I had no limits. It suggested an inchoate mass, a jelly-fish rather than a man. Was I not right? A jelly-fish has not the limits of a vertebrate, but the vertebrate stands higher in the order of creation. If you mean by limits the boundaries that go to make up a definite and positive ideal of life, then such limits are not limitations but advantages. To be without them is to be without character, for character consists of limits that come through the self-mastery of the will. To be without such self-mastery is to be without morality. A man may

try to be so broad that he becomes only thin, not an object but an ooze. The mere cosmopolitan, without any definite limits, is not the broadest but the narrowest of men. He must have his roots somewhere, or he will have them nowhere. He who tries to know all things equally knows nothing. Let him not study first the whole universe, but first the meanest flower that blows, until in it he shall find the universe and the thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. Such limits are not a defect but a glory.

Take another illustration from a widely different field. In Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, the general assumption is that I can know an object only as it is brought into relation with myself, and that therefore I cannot know it as it truly is. To use the Kantian phrase, the "thing in itself" must remain unknown. Hence all knowledge is limited, and can never express the exact truth. The answer has been given often enough. What do we mean by

knowledge? Knowledge *is* bringing an object into relation with myself. That is exactly what we mean by knowledge. But then to turn round and assert that this fact is a limitation of knowledge is the veriest nonsense. Knowledge is a relation between the knower and the known. If that fact be a limitation, then the more perfectly that relation is established, that is, the more perfectly a thing is known, the more absolutely it is unknown! The very conditions of absolute knowledge are made the cause of absolute ignorance. The theory asserts that, in order to know things truly, we must know them as they would be if they were unknown, and then it calls that supposed fact a limitation of knowledge! Seldom has nonsense been spoken in so solemn a form. The whole theory rests on a confusion between conditions and limitations.

Now let us apply this distinction to our subject, the idea of God. One theory of divine perfection is that, if God is perfect, it is impossible that He

should act for any end or purpose, for such actions imply that He lacks something, and therefore is not already perfect. This view is clearly stated by Spinoza: "This doctrine does away with God's perfection. For if God works to obtain an end, He necessarily seeks something of which He stands in need." [1] For this reason Spinoza rejects the whole idea of purpose as applied to God.

Mill holds exactly the same idea of purpose, although he uses it to support exactly the opposite conclusion. Finding evidences of design in nature, he infers that therefore God is not perfect, and that, especially, He is not omnipotent. "It is not too much to say that every indication of Design in the Kosmos is so much evidence against the Omnipotence of the Designer. For what is meant by Design? Contrivance: the adaptation of means to an end. But the necessity for contrivance —the need of employing means—is a consequence of the limitation of power.

[1] *Ethic,* Part I, Appendix, trans. by White, p. 41.

Who would have recourse to means if to attain his end his mere word were sufficient?" And again, "Wisdom and contrivance are shown in overcoming difficulties, and there is no room for them in a Being for whom no difficulties exist." [1] Thus because God does something for a purpose, He is essentially a limited Being. Spinoza and Mill agree in their argument and differ in their conclusions. Spinoza holds that God is perfect, and therefore does not work for purposes. Mill holds that God does work for purposes, and therefore is not perfect.

Here we have the issue perfectly clear. What is perfection? Which is the more perfect, a Being who does something, or a Being who does nothing? A God who loves, and who, out of the fullness of His love, works to bring about a kingdom of righteousness and truth, or a God whose fullness is static? The latter is a God eternally the same, an empty fullness that does not dare to act,

[1] *Three Essays on Religion.* Essay on *Theism,* Part II, *Attributes.*

"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
Dead perfection, no more."

The former is a God rich with all the fullness of creative and redeeming love. The one is the God of pantheistic identity, of the speculative Absolute. The other is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Which is the greater, the more perfect, God?

Here I claim William James as on my side. He, to be sure, speaks of God as finite, as a limited God. And yet that finiteness and those limits make his God, according to his own statement, a higher Being than the abstract Absolute whom he rejects. That Absolute, he says, introduces "tremendous irrationalities into the universe," he is a being of "essential foreignness and monstrosity," he does not yield the largest balance of rationality. Why not frankly say that this Absolute is really limited in comparison with the God who creates a free and moral world?

I trust I may be pardoned a word of personal reminiscence. Shortly after

A Pluralistic Universe was published, I met William James, and said to him, "I have just been reading your *Pluralistic Universe.*" "What did you think of it?" he asked. I said, "I think that I agree with it, only what you call 'pluralism' I call 'creation.'" He turned sharply, and, in his impulsive way, laying his hand on my arm, he said, "That's it, that's it exactly. But 'creation' is a dreadfully bad tag to put on it. It smacks of Scholasticism. A dreadfully bad tag. But that's it." I would not quarrel with the memory of William James about tags. But I submit that the words "finite" and "limited" are equally bad tags. But what I am after is simply this, that the Christian God of love, working out His purposes in a universe of the free sons of God, and meeting with all the difficulties that a free universe presents, that such a God is higher than a God whose so-called perfection expresses only static identity and eternal monotony.

IV

POWER THROUGH LIMITATION

It must be confessed that Christian theology has too often been untrue to the concept of the living God which we have been considering, and has too often tended to exchange it for the thought of the passionless Absolute. How this change took place is a long story, and yet the outline is clear enough. The trouble began as soon as Christianity came into contact with the Græco-Roman world, and was forced to express its thought in terms of that world. It immediately had the task of trying to unite the Christian idea of divine perfection and the Greek idea of divine perfection. And these two were different. The Hebrew thought was that of the creative God, working for something new, pressing forward to the bringing in of His kingdom. And

the Christian concept carried out this thought to the uttermost. God is the creative Father. Old things are passed away; all things are become new. The new Jerusalem, the city of God, is looked for, coming down out of heaven. There shall be the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And neither to Hebrew nor to Christian did such a thought raise any problem as to limitations in God. God was looked on as the supreme Being just because in Him are all the inexhaustible riches of a new world.

Now this concept met in the Greek world a very different idea of perfection. To the Greek, God was not primarily living will, but, rather, pure substance, absolute Being. The difference between the divine nature and the world was the difference between identity and change, between Being and Becoming. God lies outside the movement of time, apart from the rush and hurry of life. To the Greek, reality was the unmoved substance. The world of change and movement was

essentially unreal. The supreme reality, God, must be free from change.

It was a difficult, an impossible, task to reconcile these two ideas of divine perfection. They kept house together, but were never really at one. That the Christian theology got along as well as it did, and preserved under such hard conditions so many elements of Christian value, is testimony to the strength and vitality of the Christian belief.

Take one special instance of this opposition. The Greek idea was that God was impassible, incapable of suffering. The Christian belief was that God is love, and that the supreme revelation of God is given in Him who died on the cross. Yet Christian theology, in its union with Greek philosophy, tried to maintain the impassibility of God. But, if God is love, surely He must suffer. To sore straits was Christian theology put to maintain that God is impassible and yet that God is love. It was an impossible task. It was a contest between two opposed ideals. Is it higher to be free from suffering or

to suffer? The former view is, in the strict sense, pagan, it is not derived from Christian sources. The latter is the Christian thought. It presents suffering as a higher thing than inability to suffer. It claims that the highest, most perfect, most exalted thought of God is that of Him who manifests His glory in His partaking of human life and human needs, even to the sacrifice of the cross. The doctrine of divine impassibility has no place in a Christian theology. For love means suffering. And the greatest of all is love.

If my argument is sound, we come, then, to this result, that these so-called "limits" in the idea of God are not defects but excellencies. They are the conditions of His greatness. And now we can apply this result to the special problem of God's omnipotence, and, therefore, of His responsibility for the war and for the evils that it involves.

What do we mean, what can we mean, by the omnipotence of God? Are there limits to the idea, limits that

are not defects but, rather, conditions of the idea itself, and, especially, conditions derived from the nature of moral reality and of a moral God?

Orthodox theologians have generally agreed that God cannot do that which involves a contradiction. So it is stated by Thomas Aquinas, who, therefore, contends that God cannot make the past not to have existed. Few theologians would hold that God can make two plus two equal to five, nor would this fact be considered a deficiency of the divine power. One might as well hold that, because God does not *know* that two plus two equals five, therefore He is not omniscient! Neither power nor knowledge has any meaning as applied to the field of logical contradiction.

Now the strange thing has been that Christian theologians have been reluctant to apply this same logic within the moral sphere, unwilling to maintain that God simply cannot do that which involves a *moral* contradiction. Righteousness has been considered a

thing, which could be created by force. Adam is supposed to have been endowed with an original righteousness, as though it could have been put on him from outside like the garment of skins. I think it was the New England theologian, Nathanael Emmons, who held that every volition that man has is directly created by God and given to man, and yet that man is responsible, because every volition is free. And he solves the contradiction by recourse to the divine omnipotence; God makes a free volition and gives it to man!

Nor need we suppose that such moral contradictions belong only to an ancient and outworn theology, at which we can afford to smile. We still play fast and loose with the idea of omnipotence in the moral sphere. We still ask why God doesn't stop the evil of the world, as though it could be stopped by force, why, in the place of warring nations, He does not bring in the kingdom of God, as though the kingdom of God could be brought in by a fiat of

the divine might. And if we say that He cannot do these things, we make that fact a defect in God's omnipotence. Mansel, in his *Limits of Religious Thought,* held that God can do "moral miracles," that is, suspend the laws of right which He has laid down for men. And we have not outgrown that conception unless we are willing to say that omnipotence has no meaning when applied to a moral contradiction. Strange indeed that we should be sensitive to the contradictions of mathematics or logic, and yet calmly accept the contradictions of morality! And yet we profess that the essence of God is love. Are we not worshiping the mathematical God of Spinoza rather than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

We have made our own difficulties through failure to think through the thought of God in Christian terms. We have raised a false conception of omnipotence, and when it has failed we have made God responsible for the failure. We have conceived the lack

of brute force to be a defect in God. We should rather say that the real defect would be the failure to control and master force—

> "Oh, it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant."

And God is not a giant, but a Father. I have heard the late Professor Nash say that the supreme thing about God is His self-restraint. And self-restraint for the sake of righteousness is not less than power but more than power. Was it not Rothe who said, "God has His absolute power absolutely within His power"? That is the only kind of omnipotence that belongs to the Christian God.

Do not these thoughts help us as regards the problem of God's goodness and God's power, and hence as regards God's responsibility for evil? That God is good is the heart of Christian faith. That He wills to stop the evil of the world is a belief without which we cannot feel that we, in fighting against evil, are fellow laborers with

God. That He cannot all at once stop the evil is simply to say that God is a moral Being. His omnipotence is the omnipotence that belongs to such a moral Being. To ascribe to Him an omnipotence of a different kind, and thus to produce an opposition between His goodness and His power, is to ascribe to God an omnipotence for which there is no Christian or moral justification. God cannot be blamed for not possessing an omnipotence that would contradict His character. If that be to ascribe limits to God, make the most of it. Such limits are but the conditions of His moral greatness.

I only suggest here the way in which these thoughts should be applied to the problem of evil in its details. Such an application should deal, first, with the physical world and its apparent indifference to moral values. And here we must maintain that such an unmoral world must itself be justified on moral grounds. If there is to be a moral world, there must be as its basis a world of unchanging order and regu-

larity, for thus alone can there be a field for man's moral activity. God might conceivably have made a world in which He should at any moment intervene to prevent men from suffering the natural consequences of their own deeds, He might prevent the fire from burning the child who touches it. But such a world would be a capricious and changeable one, incapable of being subdued by man's knowledge and man's will. If God wills to produce righteousness in man, then there must be for man's field of activity this world of unchanging law, which man can subdue and conquer only by a long process of development. That should be our approach to the problem of physical evil, or suffering.

And then we must maintain that if God is to produce a moral universe He cannot produce it by force. A set and determined world is not a moral world. To rule out the chance of moral failure is to destroy the moral world itself. God cannot drive men by force either into heaven or into hell, for moral suc-

cess and moral failure cannot be produced like *things*. If God be a moral God, the world cannot be without risk. God is the supreme Adventurer, and He cannot escape the risks that every moral adventure involves. Not to accept the consequences of that belief is to be untrue to the moral, the Christian, thought of God. To construct an omnipotence that shall make man's failure impossible is to play with moral contradictions. That should be our approach to the problem of moral evil, or sin.

Either of these subjects is a theme by itself, and I only suggest these applications. I prefer to devote the rest of my discussion to one additional thought about the concept of omnipotence which we have been considering.

V

THE TRUE OMNIPOTENCE

IT may seem that my result is practically to deny the omnipotence of God, or, at any rate, to deprive the idea of its religious significance and value. May it not be said that I have played fast and loose with words, that I have retained the word "omnipotence," but have deprived it of all its contents? It is easy to say that God cannot do that which is contrary to His moral nature, and to assert that that "cannot" is not a limit to His omnipotence, but is only the condition that attaches to the omnipotence of a God of righteousness and not a God of force. But what content then remains to the idea? It is that question that I would now consider. I will try to state what seems to me the true moral, the true Christian, contents of the belief in the omnipo-

tence of God, and to indicate how that belief is related to the special problems of our own time.

The religious situation to-day seems to me something like this. We believe in the goodness of God. The doctrine of the divine Fatherhood has become a commonplace of our theology. We all accept the words of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father." But how about the word "Almighty" that follows? Do we really believe in the almightiness of God? Do we really believe that God actually counts in the affairs of men? That is more doubtful. And has not the whole course of this discussion tended to confirm that doubt? Yet we have also considered the value of the belief in omnipotence. We have seen that that belief was the backbone of Calvinism, and that through that belief the Calvinist won a courage and a devotion to God's cause that may well put to shame the supineness of our modern faith. Yet there are few Calvinists to-day, and it is generally felt that Calvinism grossly

misinterpreted and even denied the goodness of God.

The situation then is this. We, today, believe in the goodness of God, but we tend to disbelieve in His power. The Calvinist believed in the power of God, but tended to deny His goodness. May we not, must we not, unite the vital elements of these two beliefs? And the only moral, the only Christian, way to do so is to believe that God is omnipotent because *good* is omnipotent, that God is omnipotent because *right* is omnipotent, that when Jesus said, "With God all things are possible," the heart of that saying is that all things are possible for love. God rules the world, not because He holds the scepter of power, but because righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne.

That is a hard belief to hold in these days when force aspires to rule the world. And yet it never was more needed. We have been called on to fight, to defend the sanctities that are more precious than life, to defend them

against the forces of brutal power striving to establish a dominion whose final law is might. To that task we have been called on to give all our energies, to sacrifice, if need be, life itself. We can worthily accomplish that task only if we can rally to it the hidden spiritual sources that are the foundation of true strength. To do that, we need supremely the belief in God, the belief that God is righteous, and the belief that righteousness is the power that shall rule the world. For what have we fought, for what must we fight now that the war is over? Is it simply to supplant force by force, to set up against Germany another Germany? If so, we fight as pagans and not as Christians, the God in whom we trust will be a God of brute power and not a God of righteousness. Rather, our purpose is so to use force that force shall yield to righteousness. We are to use force with the deep conviction that force is not the final thing. We are to look for a City whose maker and builder is God, the foundations of

which cannot be shaken, because they rest on the rock of righteousness. If with a good conscience we use the force of armies and battleships, it must be in faith that armies and battleships are to prepare the way for something greater than themselves, the way of Him who is the King of righteousness, and, after that, King of peace. We can use force not because it is the final thing, but just because it is *not* the final thing. Force, like John the Baptist, must yield to that which is greater than itself, it must prepare the way of the Lord, it must make straight in the desert of human life a highway for our God. And our God is the God of righteousness, and *therefore* the God of strength.

I plead for a larger conception of omnipotence, for the belief that goodness is itself omnipotent. It is a hard thing to believe, and yet without that belief life to-day is not worth living. If brute power is the supreme power, then indeed the world can never be made safe for democracy. That safety

can be assured only by the belief in the omnipotence of right.

That belief is essentially the Christian belief, that thought of omnipotence is essentially the Christian thought. It was the belief of Jesus, and we must remember that it was for Him no easy belief. It was won only through struggle and temptation. The temptation of His life was to rely on some other power than the power of God, to become the Christ of power instead of the Christ of the will of the Father, to suppose that the Kingdom of God could be established by the forces of this world, instead of by the forces of righteousness and love. That false Christ He rejected. For that nobler faith He struggled, for that faith He met the supreme defeat of the cross, and changed it into the victory that overcame the world. The cross of Christ becomes the sign and symbol and realization of the supreme power of God. In the cross is revealed the true omnipotence of God.[1]

It is strange that the Christian Church has so often failed to realize that the cross is the token not of weakness but of power. And the reason is that Christians have too often failed to grasp the true belief in the omnipotence of God. They have too often thought that, when the powers of righteousness and love shall fail, they will then be supplanted by powers of another kind, by powers that cannot belong to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not know where this unchristian interpretation has been more clearly presented than in the theories of the second coming of Christ. Of course I do not mean to interpret any such theories in a gross, materialistic form. We are here dealing with spiritual realities, and the language must be the language of metaphor. But it is exactly this metaphorical language to which I appeal. What essential ideas are intended to be conveyed by the language about the second coming, in hymns, in preaching, in current thought? Is it not the idea that the

first coming of Christ was in weakness, and that the second coming shall be in power, that the cross is first offered to men as the expression of divine love, and that, when that shall fail, God will use stronger and more effective means, and will finally establish His kingdom by means of force? Yet surely the only Christian thought is that the final reign of Christ shall reveal none other omnipotence than that of the cross, the omnipotence of the love and righteousness that alone can overcome the world. To interpret the reign of Christ in any other way than that is to fall back upon a pagan and not a Christian concept, it is to exalt force above righteousness, rather than to believe that righteousness is the only force.

Let me recall to memory a splendid scene presented in the book of Revelation.[1] The seer sees in the hand of Him that sat on the throne a book sealed with seven seals. It is the book of human life, the book of the world's history. But the book is sealed, and

[1] Rev. chap. 5.

no one is found worthy to open the book or to loose the seals thereof. Who is the Master of the world who can give the key that shall explain the mystery of human life? "And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." The Lion has prevailed, the emblem of strength, the power that can control the world. "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain." The Lion of power is revealed as the Lamb of sacrifice. In the cross is shown the supreme power of God. "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

"In the Lamb that is slain is revealed the power, the omnipotence, of God."

If this war is rightly to affect our thought of God, it must lead us to a deeper emphasis on the genuine Christian elements in that thought. The Christian belief gives us no picture of God as a hard, static, unchanging Being, ruling with physical force over a set and determined universe. It shows us God in the midst of human life, a living, loving, personal God, sharing our infirmities, fighting our fight, overcoming evil by good. Said the Master, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This he said on the night before the cross. In the tempted, struggling, suffering, dying, yet triumphant Christ, we see the supreme revelation of the God in whose hands are the issues of life, because in Him is the supreme power of a righteous and conquering love. Believing in that God, and in the omnipotence that is His alone, the omnipotence of a righteous and loving will, we can with brave hearts become fellow-workers with Him, sure of Him

who fights with us even to the end, sure that the eternal God is our refuge, and that underneath us are the everlasting arms.

In this discussion of God's responsibility for the war, I have limited myself to the one subject of the omnipotence of God, for there lies the heart of the problem. I am confident that a more living, a more personal, a more Christian conception of what omnipotence means, will lead us to a deeper thought of God, a thought that will give us help in this time of need. I am convinced of the importance of the subject. With this conviction, I hope that even my imperfect presentation may help some readers to results of far more value than my own.

THE END

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE following pages contain advertisements of a few of the Macmillan books on kindred subjects.

RECENT RELIGIOUS HAND BOOKS

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY CRUSADE.

By LYMAN ABBOTT

Viewing the present war as the greatest demonstration in all history of the extent and power of Christianity. *In preparation.*

THE WAY OF LIFE.

By HENRY CHURCHILL KING

A discussion of the Sermon on the Mount with chapters on Christ and the war. *In preparation.*

NEW HORIZON OF STATE AND CHURCH.

By W. H. P. FAUNCE

"Broad, profound, scholarship, close relationship with progressive sentiment all over the land, and unusual powers of keen analysis."— *Philadelphia North American.*

THE WAR AND THE BIBLE.

By H. D. ENELOW

Contents:— The Spiritual Problems of the War; The Attitude of the Bible Toward War; The Ethics of War in the Bible; Some Great Wars of the Bible; Heroes of War in the Bible; The War Poetry of the Bible; War Prayers in the Bible; Parallels to the Present War in the Bible; The Ideal of Peace in the Bible.

THE CHRISTIAN MAN, THE CHURCH AND THE WAR.

By ROBERT E. SPEER

The essentials of a problem which has exercised Christian men since the beginning of the war.

THE BEST MAN I KNOW.

By WILLIAM DEWITT HYDE

"Presented with a vigor that is like the sting of salt winds, bracing and wholesome."— *Christian Register.*

ARE YOU HUMAN?

By WILLIAM DEWITT HYDE

"Every man ought to get and digest this book"— *Pacific Churchman.*

THE CHURCH AND THE MAN.

By DONALD HANKEY

"Filled with the wise sincerity of a religious conviction that cares little for creed and miracle."— *Boston Transcript.*

IT'S ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK.

By HENRY CHURCHILL KING

"Good bracing council . . . a book for all who wish to acquit themselves well in the battle of life."— *The Dial.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

History of the Religion of Israel

By GEORGE A. BARTON,

Professor of Biblical Literature and Semitic Languages, Bryn Mawr College.

Cloth, 8°, $2.00

This volume presents a sketch of the unfolding of the great religious ideas of the Hebrew people from the birth of the nation to the time of Christ. Each period of development is interestingly described in successive chapters, in which the heroes and prophets of Old Testament story, the ideals that controlled them, and the problems that confronted them are made to stand out with life-like vividness. Separate chapters deal with the development of the priesthood, the belief in angels and spirits, the Messianic ideal, and the influence of Greek thought upon Judaism. The religious spirit of the Psalter, Job and of other books is interpreted with sympathy and insight. More than most writers on the subject the author has sought to understand the beginnings of Israel's religion, to present its development attractively, and to help the student to appreciate its contribution to Christianity. Written from the point of view of modern scholarship, the book is throughout reverent and constructive.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

Psychology and Preaching

By CHARLES S. GARDNER

Cloth, 8°, $2.00

"Psychology and Preaching" is a thorough study of the more important mental processes involved in preaching, from the standpoint of functional psychology.

After a discussion of the general mental processes — intellectual, emotional and voluntary — as they function in preaching, it takes up first the psychic phenomena of the mass as they appear in assembly and community groups; second, three important occupational types, the minister, the laboring man and the business man; third, the "modern mind" or the peculiar mental attitudes of modern men as contrasted with the characteristic attitudes of more primitive men. The book should be especially helpful to ministers, as well as of service to all who are interested in present day religious problems.

Public speakers generally should find it suggestive.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

The World Within

By DR. RUFUS M. JONES

Author of "The Inner Life," "St. Paul the Hero," Etc.

$1.25

Rufus M. Jones has written a companion volume to his very popular little book, *The Inner Life*. The new work is called *The World Within* and in it Dr. Jones deals effectively with some of the more essential aspects of the religious life, particularly of prayer and faith. There is a good setting forth also of the ethical argument for immortality. The book begets confidence and persuades the reader to acknowledge the importance of religion.

"*The World Within,* by Rufus M. Jones, author of *The Inner Life,* is divided into eight chapters. It is another book well worthy a place in almost any library, but it probably will better fit in a library of religious books than elsewhere. The author is not new to the religious public. He has lectured successfully and written successfully. It may be doubted if he has written anything to which he has given closer attention and care."— *The Milwaukee Sentinel.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

Drown, E. S. D.D. D839

God's responsibility for the war.

1919 Apr 8	Prof Mueller	May 19			
1920 n.	"	Feb 1,			

231.8R
D839

Y0-CAL-952